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# THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

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THE unique thing in Israel was not psalmody, for there are ancient penitential psalms much older than any which have come down to us from David ; nor legislation, since many ancient nations worked out systems of law embodying important principles ; nor philosophy, for important as were the problems of Hebrew philosophy, it cannot be said that any of these problems were satisfactorily solved. The one thing which Israel possessed, to which other ancient nations may legitimately lay no claim, was *prophecy*.

IN any study of prophecy it is essential that the right point of view be gained. A failure to appreciate the relationships of prophecy will involve a failure to appreciate its real nature. Prophecy was compelled to adopt as its vocabulary, words and expressions used in pagan divination or in the ordinary forms of speech. The word for "prophet" was applied to a particular class of persons in a comparatively early period of the development of the class, and described a certain characteristic, namely, "the inspiration that streamed upon them and seemed to snatch them away beyond the limit of self-conscious thinking life." The verb from which this noun is derived means in certain forms "to go about raving under the constraining influence of a high power ; an irresistible excitement." The fundamental root represents an involuntary speaker ; one who speaks under compulsion that which has been communicated to him. This earlier sense, in which there is a reference to a trance or ecstatic vision, was in

PROPHECY  
IN ISRAEL

THE  
VOCABULARY  
OF PROPHECY

later times to a greater or less extent lost. The phrase, "and God said," is the most common expression in sacred literature to represent the prophetic utterances. This phrase, it may be observed, (1) is indefinite as to the manner of speech, being used like the other expressions of divine communication; (2) soon came to represent the prompting of the heart, the voice of conscience, and is used not infrequently of utterances and of ideas which the false prophet represented as coming from God, or which later experience shows that God himself would not endorse. The false prophet in this case cannot always be charged with a purpose to deceive, for in many instances he honestly believed that he was telling the word of God. Time, therefore, was required to sift the alleged "sayings of God" and to determine whether after all they bore the divine stamp; provision for this test, it will be remembered, was made by Moses before his death.

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IN securing its vocabulary, therefore, prophecy was compelled to have recourse to language which had already been adopted by heathen soothsayers, or phrases which had only an ordinary meaning. In the former case the spirit of prophecy purged and purified the word, modifying very greatly its essential meaning; in the latter case it lifts the ordinary phrase to a higher and nobler plane. The point deserving of special consideration in all this is that while prophecy was unique, it nevertheless had as its point of departure something, the need of which all other nations felt; something, indeed, for which they had a kind of substitute, but something which they had not yet secured.

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ORDINARILY there has been ignored in the consideration of Israelitish prophecy what really constitutes its most important element, namely, the educating and uplifting influence of certain lives and events which are to be interpreted as real prophecy, as at all events intended, if there is such a thing as a plan in history, to do for the people what direct *utterance* of great and fundamen-

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tal truths would do. Every great life in Israelitish history was a prophecy; every great event was a religious object lesson. These lives and events furnish the basis for all prophetic utterances. Any treatment of Old Testament prophecy which does not include the important events of Israelitish history will be one-sided and incomplete. Israel is unique in many things and most of all in the loftiness and ideal character of its great men, and in the strange and miraculous character of its historical situations throughout centuries. All this material constitutes what may be called living prophecy.

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IN many cases a prophet inspired from above tells the story of the past recalling how God led individuals or nations. He writes down this record of the past; a patriarch's devotion to Jehovah and the reward; the nation's apostacy and the slavery which followed; a royal prayer and the miraculous deliverance; a prophetic mission and the city turned from sin. With what motive in mind has he written these stories? In order to encourage or warn his countrymen. These experiences of the past show the people of his times the reason for the calamity which has befallen them or serve as notes of encouragement with reference to future relief. This material—the larger part of Genesis, the first half of Exodus, the Books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings, is prophecy, and, when recognized as stories told in order to convey religious truth, they will be most easily understood. Tradition itself calls the Books of Samuel and Kings prophetic books. To omit this material from prophecy is to overlook the very basis of all prophecy, and indeed, prophetic utterance in its simplest and most effective form. To distinguish this kind of prophetic utterance from other kinds we may perhaps use the term *experience* prophecy.

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WHEN the speaker who represented God looked about him and saw at one time corruption, cruelty, and apostacy, at another right living, kindness and loyalty, and assured those within the reach of his voice that the one situation was contrary to God's law, destined to bring down severe and condign punishment; that the other situation

**EXPERIENCE  
PROPHECY**

**DESCRIPTIVE  
PROPHECY**

was in accordance with the law of God, and already marked with indications of divine favor — this was prophecy of the present and may be called *descriptive* prophecy. The speaker in tones which all understand describes, now in pathetic speech, now with scathing irony, the sins and wickedness of the people about him. The shortcomings of all classes are known to him; he rebukes kings; he pleads with the masses; no profession, no calling is too high or too low; all alike deserve his criticism, his stern rebuke; all alike, when needed, receive his words of comfort and encouragement. Such speech, in which the books of prophecy abound, is prophecy growing out of the present, principally for the sake of the present.

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SOMETIMES the prophet from his position on the watch tower sees at a distance that which is approaching, and going down into the midst of the people, he points those in distress or perhaps great suffering, to that glorious future on which he dwells so often and so lovingly; or in thundering tones depicts the divine wrath which is soon to sweep through the land, filled as it is with corruption and idolatry, and leave it a scene of desolation. For what purpose were such pictures presented to the people? In order to encourage or to warn; to inspire them to right action or to deter them from wrong action. It is when studied from this point of view that *predictive* prophecy can be understood.

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LIVES and events, stories from the past, rehearsed to teach a lesson, the depicting of the prophets own present, the predicting of future situations, all this enters into prophecy, and all this must be considered in any adequate treatment of the subject. No man will deny that the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament have influenced modern thought more than any other single class of utterances. The importance of the subject must appeal to all. The character of God has shown itself more clearly in these sayings than in any other which have come down to us from before the times of Christ. Is there not incentive and inspiration to such study in the thought that it treats the history

of the thought of those men who of all men in ancient times communed most closely with God?

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WITH these words of introduction our readers are referred to the outlines for guidance in the study of the history of prophecy, of which the first is published in this issue. These outlines are intended to suggest topics for consideration, with full references to the most accessible literature. Ten numbers of *THE BIBLICAL WORLD* during 1896 will contain one such outline. Those who follow the outlines are invited to send in questions, the answers to which may be published in the *WORLD*.